

> GUIDELINES : PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH CHILDREN

All contact should be positive and affirming

Teachers and support staff work in a rewarding, yet challenging, environment. As NZEI members, they accept a commitment to recognise and respect the dignity and rights of the child. They have to be mindful of societal expectations, yet personally involved with individual children. To meet these expectations, teachers (including principals, supervisors, managers) and support staff will have to come into physical contact with children. This is acceptable when carried out in a professional and responsible manner that is age appropriate.

The interactions between all staff and children are important for building caring, inclusive, and cohesive learning communities. Teachers or support staff who withdraw from physical contact of a caring nature and are guarded in their interactions with children may not be acting as positive role models.

Any intentional contact that would constitute child physical and/or sexual abuse, or be potentially harmful to the wellbeing of the individual is inappropriate.

The following are examples of contact that may be professionally appropriate:

- Emotional support, including hugging or placing a supportive arm across a child's shoulders, but only when and where needed. This is especially important in an early childhood setting or with young children when reassurance is required;
- Patting a child on the back or shoulder in a congratulatory manner when praise is due;
- Where custom and practice within cultural observances dictates appropriate physical contact;
- During the delivery of a lesson which necessitates demonstration using appropriate contact;
- Helping with toileting as appropriate;
- Personal assistance with special requirements including lifting, transferring or administering medication;
- Accident or medical emergency situations.

There will be times when, due to extraordinary circumstances, more physical contact and intervention is required. In these situations teachers and support staff may be required to act quickly and decisively to restrain children or remove them from danger.

Building a positive and caring learning environment will involve some physical contact with children. NZEI encourages all schools and centres to discuss situations where physical contact might occur, and to develop procedures and guidelines outlining acceptable boundaries for differing circumstances.

The guidelines

These guidelines cover all members of NZEI Te Riu Roa. Members are encouraged to use common sense in all areas of their interaction with children and be mindful of situations that may expose themselves to unnecessary risk. Ways that this risk can be minimised include:

- Clear school/centre policies on professional conduct and safe practice;
- Ensuring that, whenever possible, the member has another child or adult present ;
- Open and frank communication and discussion within the wider school/centre community about what professional conduct and safe practice is appropriate.

Worksite policies around physical contact

When formulating policies and developing safe professional practice, it is important to recognise the various cultural traditions, values and the expectations of different teaching contexts (e.g. early childhood, special education) regarding contact, and to ensure all groups are consulted appropriately.

Such policies should be the subject of ongoing professional development for all employees, be reviewed regularly and should include at least the following:

- Practices which prevent members from being vulnerable to allegations;
- Member awareness and training in the management and prevention of child abuse;
- Visibility in the workplace which protects both members and children;
- The recording and reporting of incidents.

Support for members

Members should be supported by both these guidelines and clear workplace policies on safe professional practice. Members can support one another by discussing, knowing and implementing such guidelines and policies.

Members have access to NZEI Te Riu Roa Field Staff and Member Support Personnel who can assist with professional development and advice.

Employers have a responsibility to provide ongoing professional development which supports safe professional practice and prevention of abuse.